

Eastern MRS Meeting Notes
May 22, 2007
Martin County Community College

Counties Present: Beaufort, Bertie, Brunswick, Cartaret, Chowan, Cumberland, Edgecombe, Green, Johnston, Martin, New Hanover, Pasquotank, Pitt, Washington

Introductions

News from Raleigh

Canada

New Secretary Dep Dempsey Benson

Discussion Items

Stopping Family Assessments

CFTs

CFSR Issue

Shared Parenting

Services Recommended

Canada

- Patrick and Holly did a presentation in Toronto for the province of Ontario Canada (which is about the size of Texas.)
- In Canada they do Child Welfare differently than we do. They have private agencies (children's aid societies) that are government funded who do their Child Welfare. There are 85 of these agencies and 100% of them attended.
- Had about 600-700 supervisors in the province and 603 were at this symposium
- They implemented differential response in April of this last year so they are still new at it. Are not doing all of the 7 strategies, just differential response.
- One woman is coming to Roanoke VA and wanted to come visit a county nearby when she is there. Were very interested in CFTs.
- Patrick and Holly were very well received, people wanted them to come back and visit their individual agencies, and also expressed interest in coming to a county here in NC – even mentioned an exchange program with Guilford.

New Secretary Dempsey Benson

- Just announced that he will be the new Secretary.
- He was the head of the task force that dealt with the Chemical fire in Apex (that is all we really know at this point!)

Kevin Campbell – many people attended something where he spoke

- Former Foster Child who is leading a project called Record Mining – which is looking for relatives for children to be placed with.
- Particular useful for older teens and children aging out of care. Especially for ones that don't have a support network. This can help them find extended family members or other people that the child had a connection to at some point in their lives.
- We know that the more supports a person has as they move through life, the more successful they will be later in life.
- Joan says if people can leave Foster Care with a minimum of 5 important people it will improve their outcomes.

Stopping Family Assessments

Wanted to discuss the policy around the ability to cease family assessments if you get there and find out that the report was baseless. Now you have to do all the Structured Decision Making tools, but there is no finding, so no Central Registry report. The only thing this lets you out of is contacting collaterals. (Might not save you much time, but if there are 15 collaterals, it will.)

This policy was not meant for malicious reports, the policy was made to address cases where there was misinformation and should have never been made. Cases where, if all the correct information had been known, the report would never have been made, or it would have been screened out. For example: A child was reported with severe burns, but after visiting discovered that the child has severe eczema and the family is treating appropriately.

Malicious reports may be made for the wrong motivation but doesn't mean they are not true. There is a separate malicious report policy.

Asked how often people contemplated using this.

- 10 times a year (Brunswick), discussed but never done it, discussed and wanted to but concerned about biannual review so didn't, none, none, 1, none, none, none – but if we are talking about it, she would like to start -, none, none, none that she knows of, one or two (NH – not worth it, you still have to do so much, only thing you can leave out is collaterals.)
- Brunswick seems to have a lot of retaliation reports that are involved in custody. These are cases where they have just done an assessment and then get a report from the other parent. Since they were just there, and their county has a high number of malicious reports, they feel like it is ok to close out.
- People that have talked about stopping but have not: its an individual case by case thing, hoping he could get some clarification on when they could do this. They also have custody related malicious complaints.
- Is this a policy we need to keep? If so, what do we need to do?
- NH says, you need to clarify when they can use it. They are unclear.
 - Example – you get a report of someone who caused a bruise but once you get out there you find out that the person who caused the bruise is not a caretaker.
- A kid falls off his bike, neighbor sees the bruise and calls in. Once we get out there everything 100% supports that he did fall off the bike. If we carry this through and end of with a finding of No Services Needed will that still damage the family? (Call their Dr, and he might think less of them just because CPS called.)
- Goes back to having a good intake worker. One county said she wouldn't even go out just because the child had a bruise.
- Policy is very nebulous, because it is hard to say what reports can fall under this. But there are certain reports that when you go out there at some point the evidence is so clear that it doesn't make sense to keep going.
- Example – report on a child who was badly burned, turned out the child had eczema and the reporter just saw the child and did not know his history.
- Want to make sure the child is safe, but need to use our resources (DSS and SW time) well, and respect the families privacy if there is nothing going on.

- Some counties do 5104s in these cases with a finding of No Services Needed. Others argue that if you do not complete the assessment, then you didn't really make a finding – and if that is the situation, what happens to that case?
- What would we like it to read? How would we clarify it?
 - Need to clarify what we do about reporting, 5104 or not?
 - Give some scenarios of what are cases that would be good for this.
- Think we are accepting more reports than we should because we are afraid not to – any case could be “the one”. Probably need to tighten up intake.
- What about abolishing policy?
- We are not really stopping. If we have already filled out all those forms, just not calling collaterals, that is not really stopping. However if the family gives you 15 collaterals it could save you some time.
- Add a code on 5104 SVCs not recommended because the allegations not valid.

CFT

Required within 30 days of case decision, quarterly thereafter, if high or intensive risk must have a facilitator that is not the SW for the case. Case plans must be completed in CFTs.

- New Hanover thinks your success depends on your resources, personnel and technology. They have contracts with a mediation center so that there is a facilitator and not burdening DSS staff. Also these people have laptops so they can type up the case plans and other paperwork during the meeting and print it out to give everyone copies and sign at the meeting.
- Other counties have budgetary and other issues to hire a facilitator. Hard to have someone who knows enough about CPS policy to ensure that the plan being developed at the meeting meets DSS mandates. Burden to have someone already on agency to do that with other job tasks and additional training. Resistance from staff.
- Are hearing from counties that do have CFTS up and running that they are time up front but that they really do take time off the back end. Get better case plans out of it. This is just anecdotal because we do not have enough data yet because a lot of people haven't gotten CFTs up and running consistently, and some counties not entering data at all.
- CFTs are NOT going away. This policy may be tweaked, but it will not disappear.
- What if family won't go to the CFT? Can you mandate them to attend that if they are following the plan? Well, it can be a CFT with only the family. It can't with all the professionals and not the family, but it could be with just the family and the CPS SW. Depends on who her supports and other services are. Not an ideal CFT to have just DSS and the family, but it can count.
- CFTS are to continue through the life of the case, including Foster Care (this policy – Chapter 4 – has not been revised and CFTs may not be mentioned as much or as clearly here as in Chapter 8.)
- If you collapse a P-PAP and a CFT meeting together and only do one set of paperwork, be sure to note on the forms that it was a combined meeting. They are finding when they read records that there is documentation for P-PAPs but not any documentation for CFTs and suspect this is part of that reason.

- Talking about CFTs early and often leads to more people getting involved and this may relieve some of the burden on the social worker. If mom's friend knows that mom needs a ride to parenting class – she might be willing to do it, so DSS worker won't have to.

What would you like?

- Funding – for facilitators. (Need to enter your CFTs in the database so we will know how many we have)
- Governor's initiatives school counties – (some are here) There were 13 counties that received a facilitator position for school based issues and CFT issues. That person can help
- Finding facilitators – suggestions from Patrick: people that retired from DSS, any agency that has people that are in a helping profession – although you need a basic knowledge of child welfare, don't really need to know all of DSS policy, because there will be other people from DSS in the room. If the facilitator makes a suggestion that goes against DSS policy, the SW can share why that won't work, so the facilitator can change the direction of the meeting. Biggest skills are ability to listen and to reframe. Facilitators job is NOT to write the case plan, their job is to run the meeting and make sure that everyone is heard and the meeting proceeds smoothly. This leaves the SW time to just be the social worker.

Safe surrender

- Feel that we have to do an investigation once they surrender and it is deceptive based on the ads that are running now.
- People don't know that they have the right to not provide their information.
- A woman tried to SS at the fire department but they asked her questions about herself and she thought she had to answer.
- We have to look for dad – what if he is willing to take care of the child, he had that right and the child has the right to live with his father.
- How far do you go to locate the parents?
- Patrick tried to provide some clarification , knowing that this is a murky subject. The idea is that someone can relinquish a healthy baby anonymously within 7 days of birth to a responsible person.
 - If I as the person taking the baby know the surrenderer or ask who they are and they say, then I have a legal mandate to do an assessment for abandonment.
 - If I don't know who they are I just have a safe surrender person, I can't do an assessment.
 - How far to go to find out who the person surrendering is, depends on the agency.
 - Want to get the medical history of the child, and find out if there are any people that would be willing to care for the child and the history of the family (medical).
 - Mom may have made this decision, but Dad did not necessarily agree to do so. T
 - Non custodial parents were mentioned in the CFSR and this is an opportunity to address that.
- Counties feel pressured to ID the surrendering parent and go on countywide searches for those parents. There is no clear cut line that tells them how far to go.

- Not because we want to punish the surrendering parent, but to get all info they can in the best interest of the child, medical history, and possible placement resources.
- Surrendering her child is not a spur of the moment decisions on the part of mother, so hopefully she will be willing to provide some info for the improvement of her child's life.
- What do you do when you have people calling up and saying who they think the baby's mom is? One was safe surrendered, it came out in the community, and different people called and said they thought they knew who the mom might have been.
 - Depends on the situation. Very tricky, involves legal mandates as well
- The purpose of safe surrender was to prevent legal charges from being filed against the parent. Does not affect what we do, so if we find out who mom was our confidentiality issues should protect her. You can move quickly with TPR, especially in cases like this. Still have to do a diligent search, even if it is just publishing in the paper. If someone calls in and says they think they know mom, you follow up, but you do not get back with the caller, because this was not a 'report' so they are not a reporter and entitled to the same things that a reporter would be.
- We also need to investigate to ensure it was not a kidnapping (like 14 year old daughter had a baby and her mother took the baby and gave it up, whereas the 14 year old did not want to give her baby up)
- If you have a SS and you find the mother, what do you do? Do you substantiate? If you accept as family assessment, and they will sign relinquishment
- You have to find as dependency because that is the only place you can indicate on the 5104 safe surrender.

CFSR Issues

Dealing with non-custodial parents. This was a big issue with the CFSR

- Start at the beginning of the CPS involvement trying to find them if we don't know who/where they are,
- What if mother doesn't want father involved? According to the feds, that is not the mother's option if she is not providing a safe environment for the child. Unless there are legal custodial issues or safety issues (like he beat them), we need to consider his involvement. Not her right to decide if he has the opportunity to become involved..
- Just because she doesn't like him, and even if he is a deadbeat, maybe his mother or someone else in his family could be a support or possibly a placement resource if it comes to that.
- SW completes the assessment, there are no safety concerns, but the case is still not just about mom and her children. Mom says she really doesn't want us to contact the dad, are we obligated to call him? Yes. Even if there are no safety concerns you must call him. How do you know that mom is being honest with you about the relationship?
- How much information is the non-custodial parent entitled to? If you have not TPRed you have an obligation to provide information to them. Like drugs? Only share information as it pertains to the safety of the child, not personal lifestyles of the other parent.

- Feds want the non custodial parents involved in the CFTs as well. Have to be careful in the information that comes out at CFT.
- Even if dad is in prison, what about his family?
- Request that we find out what other counties are using as search tools
- Can use US Search and if you are connected to a DSS they give you a price break.
- DOC has info on current inmates, DMV, OLV (or other systems where people receiving services), Child Support, neighboring county jails if you suspect he might be incarcerated.
- Diligent effort form in the CPS manual.

Shared Parenting

1 meeting required within 7 days of child coming into care. Know this needs to be added to Chapter 4. Probably need to beef that up and ensure that there is some type of continuing contact. Know that each case will vary, but what would be a minimum?

- New Hanover has SP meetings, they have something after that but the type and frequency varies for each case depending on the circumstances.
- Each case is so different it is really hard to try to figure out the best way to handle this.
- The concept was seen as a strength during CFSR
- Foster parents involved in transporting the children for visitation is a very natural way for them to get involved. (also works for doctors appointments, etc.)
- Is the SP policy clear as it stands now? No one had a problem with it.

Services Recommended

Some counties may have been recommending services and then not really providing the families with the resources to take advantage of them. Feds suggested that we might need to do a little handholding to get the families involved with the services we recommend. Policy requires a visit within 7 days to talk about the finding of Services Recommended.

This is for cases where there are well being needs but there are no safety issues and at no time would the safety issues ever have been enough to create adequate risk to substantiate or find In Need of Services. (This differentiates it from Services Provided, CPS services no longer needed, because in those cases there was initially enough risk that had you not put services in place, mandatory services would have been put in place.)

- Do we just go “here is a list of services” here you go and leave, or do we help them make a phone call, get them set up for their first appointment. (Policy requires a visit within 7 days to talk about the finding of Services Recommended.)
- Not very clear in the manual what counts as this. Some agencies see it as a punishment rather than a family that was basically ok but could have used some extra assistance (not safety needs)
- Not sure when to call it this. If they had a community services in place before you were there, and you want them to continue it, do you find Services Recommended? No, we don’t think so, but realize that this needs to be clarified.
- Would like to see sample letters for Services rec.

- Counties felt it was a weakness of policy that it was not clear when you found what. Understand that we can't write it to explain every situation, but could clarify this some.
- Some counties say that they have no resources to help the families. If you recommend services and the family wants to follow up, your county better figure out a way to do it. Just because it is not 215, there are other codes you can use 330, 290, etc. Talk about this within your agency.
- What if it is a services that is not being provided by your agency but by another community agency?
- One county hands those families off that meet the 200% of poverty to a position in WF.

When do you use and when do you not use CPS record checks.
ICPC – not supposed to do CPS record checks

Central Registry is not supposed to be a reference. It is supposed to be used to check children. Decisions on whether or not to approve home studies are not supposed to be based on what you find in CR but they can lead to a new line of inquiry with the family. County records will tell you a lot more, have they ever applied for assistance, what kind of relationship did they have with the family.

Future Meetings:

June

Central – June 20th Randolph Co DSS

Eastern – June 28 – Wayne Co. WAGES

July

East – July 18th Edgecombe Co